

The future of Alexander Technique teacher education

Principles, practices and professionalism

Terry Fitzgerald

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Foreword to the pdf version of the thesis

This thesis, *The future of Alexander Technique teacher education: Principles, practices and professionalism*, represents the several years of research that contributed to my gaining a Doctorate in Education (EdD) at the University of Technology, Sydney, in September 2007.

My intention in producing a pdf version of the thesis is to allow for a wider distribution than would be possible in paper or CD form. This pdf version appears in four sections, the second of which is this foreword. The other three sections are the (1) cover page, (3) the introductory section, including table of contents, and (4) the main text with references and appendices A and B. Apart from the addition of this foreword and the deletion of Appendix 'C', what you are reading here is the completed thesis, just as it appears in the UTS library.

Appendix 'C' has been removed from this pdf version because it is a replica of the chapter titled 'The Evolution of a Technique' from Alexander's *The Use of the Self* (1932/1946). It seems both inappropriate and unnecessary to reproduce the chapter here — inappropriate for copyright reasons and unnecessary because most Alexandrians will either possess or have read a copy of this classic book. In any case, my analysis does not depend on this chapter being read in its entirety.

All three academic examiners gave this thesis the highest rating. One was Jim Garrison, Professor of Education at Virginia Tech and President of the John Dewey Society. He wrote: "The dissertation recovers the past into a present that anticipates future possibilities for the development of the Alexander Technique. It could lead to the establishment of a field that may someday be called Alexander Technique Studies".

A considerable number of Alexander Technique teachers and student teachers have contributed to this work over the years this project took to complete. Many did so by simply offering me their continuing support, and others by participating in the email interviews. Readers who know themselves to be in these groups, please accept my gratitude yet again.

I welcome comments and suggestions. Please contact me at
tfitzgerald@alexander-school.com
or write to PO Box K863, Haymarket NSW 1240 Australia

Terry Fitzgerald
October 2007

Certificate of authorship/originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of candidate

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Acknowledgements

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Glossary of terms used in teaching the Alexander Technique

- Primary Control
- Inhibition
- Use
- Direction
- Means-Whereby¹

Primary Control

The primary control is the relationship of neck, head and torso. The primary control is working well when the neck is free enough to let the head be dynamically poised on the top of the spine, the spine is lengthening (or no longer shortening) and the torso is free from contraction.

In F. M Alexander's terms:

[T]here is a primary control of the use of the self, which governs the working of all the mechanisms and so renders the control of the complex human organism comparatively simple.... [It] depends upon a certain use of the head and neck in relation to the use of the rest of the body....

The Use of the Self, 1932, pp. 59-60

[The primary control is] a control that is primary in thought and action to all other forms of control.

Letter 1951 (quoted in Fischer ed. 1995, p. 282)

Patrick Macdonald (n.d.), one of Alexander's earliest graduates, also calls it "wearing the head properly ... [I]f this is done there follows a muscular harmony throughout the body".

Inhibition

Inhibition and habit come from the Latin *habere*, meaning to have, be constituted. To 'inhibit' may be thought of as to 'not-habit', that is, to not respond habitually to a stimulus; in other words, to stop and think.

¹ Throughout this thesis I use upper case to indicate Alexander's particular terminology

In Alexander's terms:

The word 'inhibition' [stands] for the act of *refusing to respond* to some stimulus (or stimuli) to psycho-physical action (not doing) ... [It is used to name] *what we refuse to do* — that is, to name what we wish to hold in check, we wish to *prevent*. (Italics in original)

Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual, 1946, pp. 87-88

Macdonald (1989, p. 49) writes:

Inhibition is a 'pause before action' ... [It] is essential for the possibility of changing the old habit patterns ... Immediately following the inhibition, the pupil must begin to think the new means-whereby, to will the new orientation of the neck, head and back (Primary Control).'

Use

Use is both noun and verb. As a noun, Use may be understood as two distinct yet overlapping ideas which Alexander called Manner of Use and Conditions of Use. Manner of Use refers to the more overtly observable patterns of everyday movements that may be amenable to change through reeducation, including breathing and voice production. As a verb in an expression such as 'she uses herself well', Use means to coordinate intelligently one's Manner of Use.

Conditions of Use relates more to the internal muscular and neurological coordination of a person, especially as it concerns the Primary Control.

In Alexander's terms:

[W]hen I employ the word 'use,' it is not in that limited sense of the use of any specific part, as, for instance, when we speak of the use of an arm or the use of a leg, but in a much wider and more comprehensive sense applying to the working of the organism in general.

The Use of the Self, 1932, p. 4

Macdonald (n.d.) writes: "The use of the leg of of the eye is but a part of the whole use of the person. The idea can be conveyed by the word 'style', as in 'style of walking' or 'style of running'.

NOTE: A more detailed description of Use is given in Chapter 6 of the thesis.

Direction

To give Directions, or more simply to Direct, is to think in a particular way about a potential movement of the body. Direction also has a sense of spatial orientation, as in the expression 'to direct one's head forward and up'.

In Alexander's terms:

When I employ the words 'direction' and 'directed' with 'use' in such phrases as 'direction of my use' and 'I directed the use,' etc., I wish to indicate the process involved in projecting messages from the brain to the mechanisms and in conducting the energy necessary to the use of these mechanisms

The Use of the Self, 1932, p. 20

Macdonald (n.d.) writes: "[U]nless we deliberately direct the proper use of our body-parts through the employment of the Primary Control, a deterioration in such use may start without our being aware of it."

Means-Whereby

The Means-Whereby is the process of an activity. It may be thought of as a series of short-term ends or goals, the consequences of which can be intelligently managed at any time in the process. An example commonly used would be standing up from a chair while paying attention to minimising habitual neck contraction. This is distinct from the purposeful gaining of an end (or End-Gaining), such as moving into standing without due regard to how this movement might contribute to neck pain.

In Alexander's terms:

The phrase 'means-whereby' ... indicate[s] the reasoned means to the gaining of an end. These means [include] the inhibition of the habitual use of the mechanisms of the organism, and the conscious projection of new directions necessary to the performance of the different acts involved in a new and more satisfactory use of these mechanisms.

The Use of the Self, 1932, p. 27

Macdonald (1989, p. 23) writes: "What is real is that means condition ends, directly, and that ends condition means, indirectly."

Acronyms

AT	Alexander Technique
AmSAT	American Society for the Alexander Technique
APTS	Alexander Professional Teaching Standards
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASAT	Affiliated Societies of the Alexander Technique
ATI	Alexander Technique International
AUSTAT	Australian Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique
CAHC	Complementary and Alternative Health Care
CMC	computer mediated communication
FTF	face to face
NOS	National Occupation Standards
STAT	Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (UK)
UTS HREC	University of Technology, Sydney, Human Research Ethics Committee
VSR	voluntary self-regulation

Abstract

The practices of Alexander Technique (AT) teacher education throughout the world are still largely based on those initiated by F. Matthias Alexander in the 1930s and modified slightly by his successors. Through the lens of contemporary educational theory and Alexander's own holistic principles, this study examines whether these practices should continue in an era when the contingencies of professional education are very different from Alexander's time. No academically viable research has ever been conducted into the value of these practices, despite debates about them becoming increasingly contentious.

Over 75 years ago, John Dewey praised Alexander for being in the forefront of what scholars are now calling the emerging paradigm of learning. In line with this paradigmatic perspective, I argue for a research methodology that is consistent with both Dewey's pragmatism and Alexander's principles of body-mind continuity and practical reasoning. This conceptual work also posits exemplary US school teacher education as a cognate model for AT teacher education.

Using critical pragmatism as a subsidiary methodology, I analyse the mandatory time-specific, practices of AT teacher education and conclude that these practices are not only anachronistic, they are also flawed to the extent they are devoid of qualitative assessment standards. As well, I critique one of Alexander's most respected texts and produce alternative readings that more clearly locate it in the emerging paradigm.

The empirical work then focusses on interview data gained by email from twenty AT stakeholders world-wide who were asked about their desires for the

future of the field. I conclude that most of the research participants would like the following practices introduced into AT teacher education world-wide: (1) flexibility of attendance, (2) qualitative standards for beginning teachers, and (3) qualitative standards for teacher educators. While uncertainty still remains about whether participants would completely give up the existing time-specific regulations, I suggest an attendance structure which incorporates the first of these findings.

Following a review of exemplary US scholarship in the field of school teacher education and an analysis of three sets of AT teaching standards currently in circulation, I propose a provisional set of beginning AT teaching standards modelled on the holistic wording of the California Standards for school teachers. These proposed standards incorporate the conclusions drawn from the critical and empirical work done earlier. Subject to usage and further research, they should meet expectations of stakeholders for teacher education practices that honour Alexander's principles and meet public demands for professional accountability.